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ABSTRACT

A research study funded by Georgia State University described the ideological and social changes in Atlanta which were a result of the growth of diverse ethnic groups in the city. Particular emphasis was given to unskilled and unemployed Latin Americans (70% Cuban) who immigrated because of political or economic upheavals in their native countries. A brief survey of the growth of ethnicity, adaptive processes, and emerging social changes among Latin Americans, Jews, Greeks, Asians, and Western Europeans was reviewed. The methods of data collection included participant-observation and in-depth interviews. An interview schedule was constructed to ascertain information on intergroup and intragroup relationships, and unobtrusive techniques. Immigrants and migrants lived among and socialized with native Atlantans of similar color. Settlement patterns within the city reflected this racial factor. The ethnic groups appeared to adapt readily to their residential settlement and to the racial separation in the city. Kinship and friendship networks were the two most important elements which functioned to maintain ethnic identity and boundaries. All groups had at least one ethnic organization which was based on social class and the larger groups had several organizations. The informal and formal organizations based on ethnicity determined power relations, and social stratification in Atlanta. (Author/JP)

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Ethnicity as a Factor in Urban Social Change in a Southern City[1]

by

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The processes of urbanism, a common experience to all nations and regions, are rooted in a particular historical and regional context. Urban areas in specific regions undergo the processes of social change at different rates which not only depend on the regional context but, in addition, on national and international trends. One process of social change within an urban setting is the development of a variety of culturally diverse groups, a process that has been slow in the American South. Recently, changes, due to the growth of ethnic groups other than Blacks, are taking place in the largest urban area of the South, Atlanta. This paper will explore these changes within the ideological and social context of the southern region. Particular emphasis will be given to the Latin Americans, the largest ethnic population in Atlanta.

The American South is generally analyzed as a developing area in the United States. During the past decade, several thousand people migrated to the region, many of which were members of different cultural groups. Indeed, in 1950, the U.S. Census Bureau reported 4,184 foreign-born in Atlanta compared to 54,070 in 1970. Within the past six years, we estimate that this number has increased by several thousand with over sixty different national heritage groups delineated. The largest ethnic groups other than Blacks in Atlanta are: (1) Latin Americans, (2) Jews, (3) Greeks, (4) Asians and (5) Western Europeans. These collectivities are not mutually exclusive and are composed of smaller groups, based on language, nationality or religion, who regard themselves and are regarded by the native Atlantans as composing an ethnic population. They were found to share some patterns of normative behavior among themselves and "form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a

social system" (Cohen 1974:ix). Indeed, Cohen feels that ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between culture groups operating with a common social context and that the basis of the group can be nationality, race, or religion. Furthermore, he feels that studying ethnicity has heuristic value in that it can aid us in analyzing the nature of socio-cultural change in urban areas.

Growing ethnicity in Atlanta offers us the opportunity to observe changes that are developing in the urban social system due to shifting alliances and a rearranging of relations among groups as they articulate with one another. Generally, American cities tend to constitute recently established and rapidly expanded social systems which have recruited their personnel from a variety of ethnic groups (Cohen 1965). Until recently, the ideological and social context in which the city developed have precluded major changes in the urban social system. The research on which this paper is based was conducted for three years in Atlanta. The techniques for the collection of data include participate-observation, in-depth interviewing, use of an interview schedule constructed to ascertain information concerning intergroup and intragroup relationships, and use of unobtrusive techniques.

The Growth of Ethnicity

In the 19th century, Atlanta became a major regional city because of its location as a transportation center. From that time to the present, the city has relied on transportation as the determinant of physical expansion (White and Crimmons 1976). In addition, Atlanta has become the financial center of the region as well as a growing international image with ninety-one foreign branches of multinational cooperations located in the city. Furthermore, more than 137 Atlanta businesses participate in international

trade (Dyson and Berry 1976), although Atlanta is not a port city. These factors, combined with a racial ideology have more or less determined the kinds of ethnic groups that have migrated or immigrated to Atlanta and the socioeconomic level of the ones that did settle in the city.

After the Civil War, there was a large-scale Black migration into the city. By 1870, Atlanta's population was 21,789 with Blacks numbering over 10,000. This percentage (40% - 50%) remained constant until 1900 at which time it decreased to about 30%. However, in the 1930's the Black population began to grow and today it represents 52% of the City of Atlanta's approximate 500,000 population (the population of the Metropolitan Atlanta area numbers over 1,700,000). A large number of Blacks live in the west side of Atlanta, near Atlanta University Center. Other Blacks live in large neighborhoods, mostly in the east or south side of Atlanta. They are considered native Atlantans, a population to which additional ethnic populations have adapted.

Other ethnic groups were slow to settle in Atlanta. Most of the ones that migrated did so because of business opportunities. Many of the members of these groups occupied a relatively high economic and social status when they arrived or became so very quickly (Hopkins 1972). In the 1850's to the 1860's, a few Italians and German Jews settled in Atlanta. By 1880, there were 1,410 people of foreign heritage in the city (3.7% of the population), with Germans composing 34% and Irish 32.5%, with the British, Canadians, French, and Hungarians making up the remaining groups (Mebane 1967). The Irish came to work on the railroads, while the German Jews were shopkeepers, skilled workers, and a few professionals. Several Jewish families had migrated from the north like Morris Rich, who founded Rich's in 1867.

From 1880 to 1896, the ethnic population increased to 2,214 (2.7% of the population) with Russians increasing in number (12.9% of the ethnic population).

From 1890 to 1920, Russian Jews, Polish Jews, Sephardic Jews, Germans, Greeks, Syrian-Lebanese and Hungarians settled in Atlanta while the 1930's witnessed the influx of a large number of German and Austrian Jews. In the 1950's a few Hungarians and Cubans immigrated and in the 1960's, a large number of Cubans and other groups from the Latin American countries settled in Atlanta. Also, during this time Koreans, Japanese, and Chinese began immigrating to Atlanta. In the 1970's several thousand Vietnamese and Indo-Chinese (Asians) have come to Atlanta, in addition to an increase in the population of Latin Americans. Indeed, compared to the growth of immigration in the United States since 1920, which has remained relatively stable, the growth of immigrants in Atlanta has quadrupled. These ethnic groups scattered throughout the city, although they did not settle in the Black areas. It appears that through time, clusters of various groups have developed in certain areas of the city and although the ethnic group may change, a specific area remained partially ethnic.

It should be noted that, until recently, the vast majority of these groups could be classified as "White," the proper category for new migrants or immigrants. In addition, the majority could be classified as "middle-class" and were, thus, acceptable to the native Atlantans. In fact, over the past 150 years, Southerners actually attempted to keep out undesirable nationalities and races. For example, the South Carolina legislature, in 1904, limited the appeals of its immigrants bureau to "white citizens of the United States, citizens of Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland, France, and

other foreigners of Saxon origins" (Berthoff 1951). Jones (1960) states that the reason immigrants did not settle in the American South was not due to their moral aversion to slavery and its repercussions since "they disliked and despised" the Negro. Rather, he feels that the lack of employment opportunities, the lack of free land to purchase, and the climate were the major factors that impeded early immigration to the region. Thus, strong prejudice against darkskinned immigrants and lack of opportunities in the South during the first half of the 20th century prevented large-scale migration or immigration to the region.

Recent Adaptive Processes

Native Atlantans give little attention to peoples from different cultural heritages; they tend to lump most groups into a general category, "foreigners," that may be subdivided based on race, language or nationality. This lumping tendency is predictable and functions to order their interactions with these "foreign people." Immigrants and migrants live among and socialize with native Atlantans of similar skin color. The categories are Black and non-Black, with Asians grouped within the latter category.[2] Settlement patterns within the city reflect this racial factor; the ethnic groups that have moved into Atlanta quickly learn these residential patterns. Africans settle in the traditional "Black sections" of the city, while European, Asian, and Latin American groups settle in traditionally White sections of the city. In fact, ethnic groups have tended to cluster in the same areas of Atlanta during the past hundred years.

Thus, the ethnic groups appear to readily adapt their residential settlement to the racial separation in the city. The process of adaptation can only be analyzed through separating social classes among the ethnic groups.

In the past, the groups increased slowly in population; new families would immigrate to Atlanta because they had kinship or friendship ties. A majority of these individuals were skilled laborers, merchants or professionals and, as we have seen, the majority were European.

Since the majority of these ethnic families in Atlanta have been middle class, they therefore, readily adapted in their public behavior. They can speak English and many lived in cities before coming to Atlanta. They participate in the major institutions in the city and because they are "White," native Atlantans have ignored ethnicity as a factor in bringing about social change. On the other hand, they have maintained their ethnic identity through utilizing similar mechanisms as the lower socioeconomic level families. These mechanisms include kinship and friendship networks, and voluntary organizations, and can be categorized as adaptation in private behavior (Hill 1975).

Consequently, ethnic groups do not necessarily undergo social organization, experience alienation, or engage primarily in impersonal relationships because of these three overlapping network systems. Kinship and friendship networks are the two most important elements that function to maintain ethnic identity and boundaries. Most intermarry within the cultural group, although interethnic marriages have occurred more often among the higher socioeconomic levels. Voluntary organizations help the people adapt to Atlanta in addition to maintaining ethnic identity. All ethnic groups have at least one organization; the larger groups have several which are based on social class. They range from golf clubs to organizations that provide transportation to hospitals, keeping a listing of job opportunities, etc. The latter help individuals to adapt through teaching them skills that enable

them to deal with impersonal bureaucracies (public behavior).

During the past decade, however, a large number have settled in the city who are unskilled, elderly and/or unable to find a job. The largest group that fits into this category is Latin American (70% Cuban). These groups have immigrated because of political or economic upheavals in their native countries. Many have come as refugees, (Cuban, Vietnamese) have little or no money, and, as a consequence, have experienced difficulty in adapting to their new environment.

Several thousand Latin Americans have settled in Atlanta and have created the largest ethnic neighborhood other than Black in the city. Many are having difficulty adapting and as a result their presence is becoming apparent to native Atlantans. The previous structures are no longer functioning to overshadow the existence of this group and their public behavior no longer "blends in" with the traditional patterns of the city. Many are attempting to utilize the social services in the city with difficulty. Language becomes a problem in interethnic communication; it precludes an adequate understanding of how to utilize the medical, educational, legal, and welfare and transportation systems. The lack of communication had led many Latin Americans and peoples from other ethnic groups as well to feel as though native Atlantans are discriminatory against them. The fact is, the average native Atlantan (Black and White) is relatively unaware of their numbers and problems in the city.

Emerging Social Changes

Several changes in the urban social system are taking place that are utilizing ethnicity as a basis for developing new avenues of communication and new ways of perceiving the structuring of the collectivities in the

social system of Atlanta. A few institutions have adapted their facilities and services to meet the demands of the Latin Americans. For example, there is a Latin American Department at the First National Banks of Atlanta; the East Central Division of Equal Opportunity Atlanta has a similar department, and DeKalb County has a person who speaks Spanish in the Community Relations Department. Several agencies provide free English lessons for the purpose of aiding people who have trouble adjusting to speaking English in the city. We find, however, that many people simply are not aware that such classes are given or they do not have adequate transportation to attend the lessons.

Ethnicity has also had impact on the public schools in Atlanta (Boyd 1976). The Adult Education section of the Atlanta Public Schools had a one-year grant, entitled "Intercultural Council," to sponsor programs monthly for the purpose of helping people from all ethnic groups in Atlanta adapt to Atlanta lifestyles. Their programs included how to use the transportation system, available opportunities in vocational education, and the legal restrictions on aliens. During 1975-76, the public school system also had a grant entitled "Ethnic Heritage Program" to develop educational materials for teaching about ethnicity in the public schools.

Perhaps the most dynamic changes have occurred in the political system. With the election of a Black mayor in 1973, many of the politically appointed offices are now held by Blacks. Indeed, during the past five years, much of the political power has shifted to native Black Atlantans who, combined with several groups of native White Atlantans, are using the growing ethnicity in the city to bring about changes. The White native Atlantans who foster exposure of ethnic groups generally occupy a high status on the socioeconomic scale. They have formed a group in 1976 called Council for an International Community (CIC) and are attempting to accomplish two goals: (1) convince

the media that time should be given to broadcast or write about peoples from different cultural heritages, and (2) convince the business people of Atlanta that ethnic groups are an untapped market for their products, goods, etc. Ironically, most of the group that have been represented at their meetings are European. In addition, we find that this group and the Mayor's office have very little contact with one another and, indeed, tension appears to exist between them. This reflects a difference in their perception of and approach to ethnicity, and their underlying motivations[3] for recognizing it as a factor for their diverse activities.

The city government has recently attempted to include Latin Americans in their policies. As previously stated, they are the largest ethnic group in the city other than Black, and thus are becoming more visible. Government-appointed commissions have increasingly included at least one position for a "Latin" person and federal grants given through the city have had the stipulation that a Latin American be employed on the grant. In January 1975, the mayor proclaimed "Spanish-Speaking Peoples Day" in Atlanta. In his speech, he emphasized the city's new "international status" and promised that Spanish would become the city's second language. The Spanish-American Council of Metropolitan Atlanta was formed in 1976 at the request of the city government. It was composed of officers from several social clubs to advise the government on how to provide services for Latin Americans (this group is currently inactive). These public changes, however, are as symbolic as substantive and reflect what Makielski labels symbolic patronage. He states that ". . . It is a means of granting formal recognition--at a low cost--to members of an ethnic group" (1975:208). Thus, while the political change

in the city has recently shifted from a politics of White identification to one of coalition politics (based on race), the political changes due to growing ethnicity in the city are currently based on ethnic identification politics.

This political style has created class and racial conflicts among the native Black Atlantans and the Latin American group and among the Latin American group itself. Some Latin Americans are suspicious of political manuevering and are skeptical of becoming associated with Blacks. This is based not only on their own racial prejudice but on public statements of Blacks such as "if we include you in our policies, we are more likely to get more federal money," or "your situation is just like ours used to be." Thus, the Blacks want the Latin Americans to identify and align with them in order to maintain a stronger coalition.

Another intervening factor, however, involves social class and nationality among the Latin Americans. Native Blacks tend to categorize Latin Americans as a homogeneous group, while the Native Whites tend to ignore the lower socioeconomic levels of the Latin American population. The formation of the Spanish-American Council on one hand and the establishment of the Hispanic Society (a social service agency) on the other has created social class conflicts among the Latin Americans. The upper socioeconomic levels do not want to be associated with social welfare services particularized for their ethnic group; they fear native Atlantans will think that Latin Americans are all poor (a traditional Black characteristic as perceived by Whites). Consequently, this group blinds themselves to the needs of a large section of the Latin population. In addition, there are serious conflicts among peoples from different Latin American nations. There is a hiearchy of nations

which, combined with social class, precluded cooperation among this ethnic population.

Furthermore, the native White Atlantans concerned with ethnicity are unaware or ignore the people who need economic help to adapt. Ironically, it is the Black native Atlantans who are aware of these problems and recently have directed funds to the Hispanic Society, an agency that responds to the needs of the lower socioeconomic levels of Latin Americans. Thus, class conflict precludes the Latin Americans from uniting. The growing refugees are uniting behind the Hispanic Society and as the city government perceives it, are presenting an organized effort to compete for resources and thus, ethnicity was not important to them in their public behavior. Two years ago, Hill stated that "strong ethnic identity is not advantageous in competition with others for resources with the city. Ethnicity was not a factor for political or economic advantage" (1975:340). Since that time, however, change has occurred that makes ethnicity an important factor in realigning social and political boundaries. This is due to the lower socio-economic levels gaining the support of the native Black leaders who, in many ways, identify with the problems of Latin Americans. The Spanish-American Council of Metropolitan Atlanta perpetuated the traditional perspective; i.e., it was not advantageous to associate with people in poverty or with Blacks. Like other higher status groups, they attempted to maintain the image that ethnic groups in Atlanta fit into the proper racial and socio-economic categories.

Another change that is taking place outside the political system is originating within the groups themselves and causing native Atlantans to become more aware of their existence. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in ethnic celebrations within the city. Many of these

events take place either in shopping centers or in churches and usually are sponsored by voluntary organizations. For example, the Greek Orthodox Church sponsors a Greek Festival each year which brings thousands of people from the Southeast to participate. Germans, Italians, and other European groups also have festivals every year. The Latin Americans held their first festival in 1976 with all national heritages represented in an arts and crafts display.[4] And in March 1977, an Intercultural Fair was held in a shopping center where areas were designated for music, dancing, singing, and other arts and crafts displays.

These events are beginning to bring the ethnic factor to the attention of native Atlantans. This reflects an international trend of growing ethnic identity in complex societies--the new ethnicity (Bennett 1975). It represents an emergence of public and private behavior of ethnic groups. Such events are fostered by the CIO and other higher socioeconomic level groups and generally, only the same status ethnic groups participate. In addition, these ethnic events are beginning to attract the attention of the Atlanta business community, who see a market for importing products from other countries for food stores, restaurants, etc. This, in turn, is increasing international trade. There are about 60 businesses owned by Latin Americans.

These changes in the business subsystem of the city however, are small as are the changes in the approach of the media. Although Atlanta now has a television show in Spanish (on Sundays at 9:30 a.m.), the media has been very reluctant to include ethnicity in their planning. If the newspaper covers a story about people of different heritages, it usually centers around cooking or other aspects of arts and crafts. It refuses to emphasize international news. The "small-town" ethos still remains. However, changes are taking

place in other subsystems that, I predict, will eventually effect the media in Atlanta.

Summary and Conclusions

The influx of a large number of peoples who represent different ethnic heritages into Atlanta is a relatively recent phenomena that is bringing about changes in the urban social system. Hannerz (1974) has pointed out that the study of ethnicity in urban environments in the United States involves two principals of organization:

> (1) the cultural, historical and geographical groupings of people who have come to regard themselves or to be regarded by others as being of the same kind, irrespective of the roles they play in the urban social system, and (2) the functional differentiation of that system, with its distribution of tasks and resources with slots to which personnel must be recruited in one way or another, which will determine the interest of that personnel to a considerable extent (1974:37).

We see the "strains and consequences" between these principals manifesting themselves in the changes that are occurring in Atlanta. Newly-created urban opportunity structures are currently influencing the expression of ethnic identity and ethnic relations within and among groups.

Indeed, as Hannerz (1974) has outlined, we find that two kinds of groups are involved in the competition for resources among Latin Americans. One is not identified by a position in the urban opportunity structure, but has attempted to gain access to or secure control over attractive niches within the structure (for example, the Spanish American Council of Metropolitan

Atlanta or Council for a International Community). The membership of these groups are characterized in Atlanta by a high socioeconomic level and has traditionally accepted and identified with the White power structure. The second type of group consists of people in a given niche and is concer[illegible] with the definition of niche boundaries and wants to insure that the greatest possible amount of resources is allocated to them (for example, the Hispanic Society). The membership of this group is characterized in Atlanta by lower socioeconomic levels.

Thus, we find that an ethnic group (Latin American) in Atlanta that has cross-cut social strata has not united to compete for resources. In fact, the less privileged of their ethnic group may, in the future, cooperate with peoples from similar strata in other ethnic groups in the political area as Cohen (1969) found among the Ibadan Hausa in Africa. The rhythms of ethnic strategies in Atlanta can best be understood from a diachronic perspective that interfaces the ideological aspects of the city and its urban structure with the kind and number of ethnic groups that settled in the city. Ethnicity is only one option open to a cultural group in an urban setting; and it is a tool (Vincent 1974) and may be stressed or underplayed, depending on the situation.

Both ethnicity and class are important factors in delineating changes in the urban social system. When class is a structural constraint, as among many Latin Americans, ethnicity emerged as the major strategy and is being perpetuated by the Black leaders due to governmental action.[5] Robbins found that among the Wabush, "ethnicity defined important social divisions among people but class explained why these divisions were important. Class was more crucial in defining social patterns than ethnicity" (1975:303). We found that ethnicity is de-emphasized as the social status of members

of ethnic groups increase. Similarly, Gans (1967) found that the life style of people in a city is determined more by economic and social conditions (class) rather than place of residence or, I would argue, ethnicity. Being White is not enough to gain access to the opportunity structure (resources) in Atlanta.

In summary, we find that when a large ethnic group settled in Atlanta over the past decade and many were poor, their public behavior could not adapt. It was then that ethnicity became a factor in bringing about urban social change. Previously their private behavior had enabled them to cope and adapt to the public behavior expected of them in the city. Now, however, the ethnic background of poor groups is becoming important in the decision-making process in the political subsystem and other subsystems in the city are beginning to slowly change their behavior toward ethnicity in Atlanta. Thus, ethnicity can be viewed from many different perspectives.

In this paper I have briefly described some of the informal and formal organizations based on ethnicity and focused on how ethnicity is related to race, power relations, and social stratification in the city. It is increasingly becoming a factor of social change in Atlanta in the areas of policymaking and planning for the future. As the city adapts to the ethnic groups, and the groups to the city, problems of other cities can be avoided. Both are changing, and in the process, the city is not becoming a monolithic "melting pot" (assuming a lack of alternative behavior) anymore than a two-category racial classification can fully explain these changes.[6] Responsible policies need to be drafted that take diverse cultures into consideration; we need to invent the future and not just cope with it. If this is done, a

positive urban environment can be created for resource competition and we will avoid destructive competition. Ethnicity on a large scale is a new phenomenon for the American South and must be reckoned with in developing a multicultural model for the urban south.

NOTES

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2. Banton (1967) has categorized the American South as once having been a two-category system. I agree, although I would not use the past tense in characterizing race relations now, expecially as they are reflected in settlement patterns and general social interactions in private behavior. Change is occurring in some sections of the urban environments, although the color line is the basis on which ethnic groups have traditionally been accepted or rejected within the city. These changes are now based on race as well as social class.

3. The motivations are political on the one hand and basically social and economical on the other.

4. Although our research indicates a trend toward more cooperation among Latin Americans from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, most Latin Americans have a strong sense of nationalism and as a consequence, we found conflicts among peoples from different countries.

5. In this case, Glazer's (1975) analysis of the government creating categories to give groups special rights is incorrect. The category already exists; the urban social system did not traditionally recognize it and thus, the power structure implemented policies that would aid the group. This does not take away individual rights; indeed, it enhances the rights of this ethnic minority. I would agree that a successful multicultural society first has to recognize the existence of ethnic groups and their place within the urban system.

6. In 1949, V.O. Key stated that "whatever phase of the Southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro" (1949:15). From my observations, this statement is still relevant although, in many areas, the power position of the Negro has shifted. However, we are still dealing with a politics of races.

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